

SAUDI ARABIA CUSTOMS

Greetings:

Between Muslims, the most common greeting is a handshake and the phrase *As-Salaamu 'Alaykum* (Peace be upon you). Frequently, males will follow up by extending the left hand to each other's right shoulder and kissing the right and left cheeks.

The greeting used depends on the individuals' relationship and status in society. When accompanied by a woman wearing a veil, a man normally will not introduce her, and one does not expect to shake hands with her. The term for “Good morning” is *Sabah al-Khair*, and for “Good evening” it is *Mesah al-Khair*.

Gestures:

One avoids using the left hand for gesturing. All objects are passed with the right hand or both hands—never with the left alone.

One beckons someone by turning the palm down and waving the fingers back and forth. It is impolite to point with the finger or to point the bottom of one's foot at another person.

It is also considered rude to cross an ankle over the knee, although crossing one's legs at the knees is acceptable and common.

Holidays:

Saudi Arabians celebrate National Day on 23 September. Islamic holidays are set according to the lunar calendar.

Officially, only two religious holidays are celebrated in Saudi Arabia: *Eid al Fitr* (a three-day feast at the end of *Ramadan*) and *Eid al Adha* (the Feast of the Sacrifice, which commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son and celebrates the annual *Hajj*).

Some Saudis privately celebrate the birth of the prophet Muhammad and the Islamic New Year, but most believe these to be modern additions to Islam and therefore unacceptable.

During *Ramadan*, Muslims do not eat, drink, or smoke from sunrise to sunset each day. Meals are in the evening and predawn hours. Public eating, drinking, and smoking are prohibited in the daytime. During *Eid al Fitr*, extended families gather for feasting, people visit senior relatives, and children receive gifts and wear new clothes.